



# SITTELLA PILEATA, *Gould.*

## Black-capped Sittella.

*Sittella pileata*, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 151, male.

——— *melanocephala*, Gould in Ibid., p. 152, female.

*Goo-mal-be-dite*, Aborigines of Western Australia.

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THIS species of *Sittella* inhabits the south-western portion of Australia, and enjoys a range extending over several degrees of longitude. It is, however, more strictly speaking, one of the species pertaining to the Fauna of Western Australia. I killed several examples during my excursion into the interior of South Australia, and I transcribe from my journal the following notes on the subject:—"I met with a flock of these birds on the hills near the source of the River Torrens, about forty miles northward of Adelaide: they were about thirty in number and were extremely shy, keeping on the topmost branches of the trees, and the whole company flying from tree to tree so quickly, that I and my companion were kept at a full run to get shots at them."

The following is from Mr. Gilbert's notes made in Western Australia:—

"An extremely active bird, running up and down the trunks and branches of the trees with the utmost rapidity, always in families of from ten to twenty in number. It utters a weak piping note while on the wing, and occasionally while running up and down the trees. Its flight, which is generally performed in rather rapid undulating starts, is of short duration."

In a letter lately received from Mr. Gilbert he informs me, on the authority of Mr. Johnson Drummond, that this species "makes a nest of short strips of bark attached together and fastened to the branch with cobwebs, and so covered over with them as to be very nearly smooth; the cobweb is laid or felted on, not wound round the pieces; portions of lichen are frequently attached. The nest is generally placed in the highest and most slender fork of an Acacia, and is most difficult to detect, from its very diminutive size and from its resembling a slight excrescence of the wood; the eggs are three in number, of a whitish colour, with circular green spots regularly distributed over the whole surface. The bird breeds in September, and Mr. Johnson Drummond states that the margin of the nest is brought to a sharp edge like that of *Piezorhynchus nitidus*. Would you not have supposed that this bird breeds in the holes of trees like the Nuthatch of Europe?"

On reference to the synonyms given above, it will be seen, that prior to my visit to Australia, I regarded, described and named the two sexes of this bird as distinct species, an error which the opportunity I subsequently had of observing the bird in a state of nature and of dissecting recent specimens has enabled me to correct; the black-headed specimens proving to be females, and those with a black cap only males.

The male has the forehead, stripe over the eye, throat, breast, and centre of the abdomen white; crown of the head black; ear-coverts, back of the neck and back greyish brown, with a small stripe of dark brown down the centre of each feather of the latter; rump white; upper and under tail-coverts greyish brown, crossed with an arrow-shaped mark of dark brown, and tipped with white; tail black, the centre feathers slightly and the outer ones largely tipped with white; wings blackish brown, with a large patch of rufous in the centre, interrupted by the blackish brown margins of some of the secondaries; all the feathers slightly tipped with greyish brown; flanks and vent greyish brown; bill yellow at the base, black at the tip; feet beautiful king's-yellow; irides buffy hazel; eyelash buff.

The female differs in being somewhat darker on the upper surface, and in having the whole of the upper part of the head including the orbits deep black.

The figures represent both sexes of the natural size.